

No intention to destroy Syed Mokhtar's business empire – Anwar

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Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim stressed that orders for Padiberas Nasional Bhd (Bernas) to share its profits with poor rice farmers were not aimed at destroying the company owner and tycoon, Syed Mokhtar Al-Bukhary's empire.

Speaking to reporters after clocking in as the finance minister this morning, Anwar explained that discussions with Syed Mokhtar were held before the decision was made.

He said the conglomerate also agreed with the decision to allocate RM10 million to be paid this month to poor rice farmers - and it will go up to RM50 million starting next month.

"I did not make the decision without negotiating with him (Syed Mokhtar), I know him and am aware it's a big company. It's not my intention to 'destroy his empire'," he said in a presser at the Finance Ministry today.

“He easily agreed to it. I did not get to meet (Syed Mokhtar), we only spoke on the phone and I thanked him.

“I said to secure poor rice farmers’ future, I will take this measure to deliberate with him and try to help,” Anwar said, adding further negotiations on the matter will be held tomorrow.

For the record, Syed Mokhtar controls 92 percent of Bernas' shares, which he acquired in 2014 from former minister Shahidan Kassim and businessperson Tan Boon Seng.

Don't politicise

Anwar was responding to allegations by certain quarters that he was going after Malay entrepreneurs.

Last night, Kedah Menteri Besar Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor was also reported as claiming that Anwar only dared to reprimand Syed Mokhtar among other wealthy corporate figures in the country because the latter is “a Malay and easily bullied”.

In response, Anwar said he was confused about how the matter got politicised as he only wished to do his best to help struggling rice cultivators.

“What is the problem in our country, what is it that they want to politicise? The decision that I made was not an easy one because I am facing companies with billions of ringgit.

“When we have the power to do our best, I think we should be able to properly negotiate for poor rice cultivators.

“Shout all you want about (protecting) Malays and Islam, but if you do not defend the plight of the poor Malays, it doesn’t mean anything to me,” the Tambun MP said.

Meanwhile, Anwar said that the issue involving Bernas had been going on for decades, stressing that it was high time to nip the pressing matter in the bud.

“This is the first time I’m saying this, enough is enough.”

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